Oil briefly surpasses $59 a barrel mark PAGE B1

Cougars notch emotional victory over Navy PAGE C1

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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Rare Egypt mosque attack kills 235

Attack on Muslims shocks nation where Christians mostly targeted

By Declan Walsh and Nour Youssef
NEW YORK TIMES

CAIRO — Militants detonated a bomb inside a crowded mosque in the Sinai Peninsula on Friday and then sprayed gunfire on panicked worshippers as they fled, killing at least 235 people and wounding at least 109 others. Officials called it the deadliest terrorist attack in Egypt's modern history.

The scale and ruthlessness of the assault, in an area racked by an Islamic insurgency, sent shock waves across the nation — not just for the number of deaths but also for the choice of target. Attacks on mosques are rare in Egypt, where the Islamic State has targeted Coptic Christian churches and pilgrims but avoided Muslim places of worship.

The attack injected a new element into Egypt's struggle with militants because most of the victims were Sufi Muslims, who practice a mystical form of Islam that the Islamic State and other Sunni extremist groups deem heretical. And it underscored the failure of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, who has justified his harsh crackdown on political freedom in the name of crushing Islamic militancy, to deliver on his promises of security.

Gunmen continues on A19

Amr Nabil / Associated Press

Relatives visit Sheikh Sulieman Ghanem, 75, center, at Suez Canal University Hospital in Ismailia, Egypt.

Online sales thin Black Friday crowds

Godofredo A. Vasquez / Houston Chronicle

The Galleria, long a destination for Black Friday shopping, wasn't exactly packed this year.

By Katherine Blunt and Ileana Najarro

Devon Ackerlund arrived at Target before sunrise, expecting the cutthroat crowds of Black Friday lore.

The Houston hospital worker finished his overnight shift and entered the store just after it opened, seeking a holiday doorbuster for the first time in his life. He had no competition as he located the display of Google Home Minis and dropped six small boxes into a big red cart.

"This is great," he said. "I thought it would be gone."

More than ever, this year's Black Friday encapsulated trends that have reshaped the retail industry at a time when convenience is king and promotions never end. Thanksgiving Day store openings and online sales again eroded foot traffic on the storied consumer holiday, which is expected to set an e-commerce record this year.

Adobe Digital Insights forecasted online sales to hit $5 billion Friday, up about 18 percent from 2016. And Cyber Monday, once Black Friday's little-known sibling, is expected to be the largest online shopping day ever, with $6.6 billion in sales.

"Those two are really converging this year, with many consumers doing their shopping on Cyber Monday and Black Friday or even

Black Friday continues on A19

Inside

» *Many shoppers use Black Friday to replace things they lost to Hurricane Harvey's floodwaters.* **Page B1**

Harvey reshapes races for Congress

Battle to replace Poe in 2nd District gains another GOP challenger

By Jeremy Wallace

Hurricane Harvey is reshaping congressional campaigns in Houston.

When the floodwaters socked the Meyerland area, it also washed out the home of former hospital CEO David Balat who was hoping to unseat fellow Republican and current U.S. Rep. John Culberson.

"Like so many people, we're being forced to relocate because of Hurricane Harvey," Balat said. "We're having to start over."

Balat is now in the market for a new home, and he's had to revise his political plans. While he's still running for Congress, Balat has amended his campaign paperwork with the Federal Election Commission and announced he is instead running for a different congressional district. Instead of Culberson's 7th District — a mostly west Houston and western Harris County seat — Balat is now among a growing list of GOP candidates hoping to replace Rep. Ted Poe, R-Atascocita, in the 2nd District.

Filing continues on A20

When a quiet holiday turned into chaos

Thanksgiving escape by condemned man changed death row

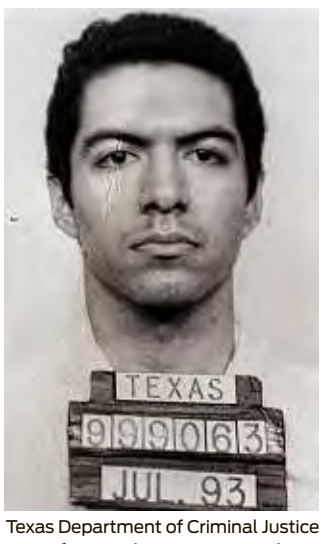
By Keri Blakinger

Warden Jim Willett was expecting a calm weekend.

It was Thanksgiving 1998, and he was full of turkey and ready to relax. With his family around him, he'd settled in for a quiet evening at the Walls Unit warden's house in Huntsville.

But in the wee hours of the night, the phone rang: There'd been an escape. From death row.

Using a hacksaw and dummies in prison garb, seven condemned men — including three from the Houston area — made an epic bid for freedom, cutting through the roof and running through a hail of gunfire like something straight out of a Hollywood film.



Texas Department of Criminal Justice

Associated Press file

Death row inmate Martin Gurule briefly tasted freedom when he escaped from the Ellis Unit in November 1998, scaling two fences.

Only one made it over the outer fence, kicking off a weeklong manhunt harkening back to the days of the Bonnie and Clyde gang — the last time a Texas death row inmate successfully made it outside the prison walls.

And while the doomed escape may not have changed the fates of most of the inmates involved — five of the seven are now dead — it has forever changed life on Texas death row. In the aftermath, officials transferred all of death row to a more secure facility, eliminated work programs and took away group recreation.

"It was the talk of all around the prison system," said Willett, who now heads up the Texas Prison Museum. "We were all wondering how this all happened."

Nearly 20 years later, there are still unanswered questions.

In 1998, death row was still at Huntsville's Ellis Unit, about 30 miles northwest of its current location in Livingston. Just a few miles down the road was the Walls Unit death chamber, the busiest in the country and one that the seven inmates were particularly desperate to avoid.

Escape continues on A20

WORLD

Olympic amputee's murder sentence doubled

A court in South Africa more than doubles the prison sentence for Oscar Pistorius to 13 years and five months for the 2013 murder of his girlfriend, model Reeva Steenkamp. **Page A15**

Getty Images file

Oscar Pistorius was originally sentenced in June 2016.

CITY | STATE

Trooper was 'the definition of a gentleman'

Texas Department of Public Safety Trooper Damon Allen, who was killed during a traffic stop Thanksgiving Day — the suspect in the shooting was caught five hours later in Waller County — is remembered as a man who got into law enforcement because he wanted to help people. **Page A3**

NATION

Trump planning overhaul of welfare system

President Donald Trump wants to put his stamp on an overhaul of the welfare system, planning more restrictions because "people are taking advantage of it," with details to come early next year. **Page A15**

Search ends for U.S. sailors in Philippine Sea

The Navy ends the search for three sailors still missing after their transport plane crashed into the Philippine Sea two days earlier; eight others aboard the flight were rescued quickly and are recovering. **Page A14**

STAR

Late-season blooms mean stressed plants

The Bayou Bend Gardens reopen for winter tours with plants sporting springtime colors — a pretty sight for fall but a sure sign of stress after Hurricane Harvey's floodwaters inundated the grounds. **Page D1**

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